Towards a framework for cooperation

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Published in:
European Planning Studies

DOI:
10.1080/09654313.2014.942601

Publication date:
2015

Document Version
Peer reviewed version

Towards a Framework for Cooperation:

Spatial Public Diplomacy on the Island of Ireland

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Abstract

European spatial planning arguments advocate a blend of strategic thinking, coordination, and related initiatives to promote and secure territorial cohesion. These ambitions embrace a set of normative agendas around economic, social and environmental convergence, competitiveness, policy coordination, and efficient infrastructure provision across space. In practice, territorial management then involves devising interventions across inter-connecting scales of governance which comprise complex agency relations, differentiated places and defined communities. In transnational contexts, attempts to foster appropriate spatial governance arrangements and relations across sovereign borders necessitate re-crafting planning and development cultures and service delivery practices to advance territorial cohesion. Transnational working necessarily involves cooperation across an extended range of institutions, interests, influences and potential actors. This paper examines attempts to secure bi-lateral commitment to a joint planning framework for the two distinct territories on the island of Ireland. Specifically it traces the formal and informal activities involved in the development of the 2013 *Framework for Cooperation* between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Informed by ideas of cross-border regionalism, it discusses the necessary spatial public diplomacy involved in the social reconstruction of strategic spatial planning to improve policy coordination and cross-border working.

Keywords: spatial strategies; framework; island of Ireland; cooperation; cross-border regionalism; territorial cohesion; public diplomacy

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Introduction

In June 2013, a *Framework for Cooperation for the Spatial Strategies of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland* [hereafter referred to as the 2013 *Framework for Cooperation*] was jointly published by the Department of Regional Development (Northern Ireland) and Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Republic of Ireland) (DRD&DEHLG, 2013). In terms of its status, the 2013 *Framework for Cooperation* is described as:

> *a non-statutory approach to providing advice and guidance at relevant spatial or geographical scales. It seeks to encourage policy makers in the public sector to take account of the wider impact of their work, to recognise and exploit opportunities for a wider perspective and to avoid "back to back" planning* (DRD&DEHLG, 2013: 5).

As a bilateral spatial planning framework for joint working across the two jurisdictions on the Island of Ireland, the document is illustrative of on-going efforts across the European Union (EU) to secure transnational regional planning and to overcome insular or "back to back" planning. The development of this particular joint statement of intent highlights a number of issues which are pertinent to international debates concerning cross-border regionalism (Scott, 1999). In advocating "co-operation", the document explicitly references the ambitions set out in the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) and the EU Territorial Agenda. In practical terms, the 2013 *Framework for Cooperation* aims to develop a shared understanding of the issues, opportunities and challenges that are frequently shared by both jurisdictions, and thereby to assist economic recovery through improved spatial planning and more effective prioritisation of investment and development (DRD&DEHLG, 2013: 5). In order for the 2013 *Framework for Cooperation* to be more than a symbolic gesture, it needs

to secure commitment to enable meaningful actions. This, it will be argued, involves a number of cognitive and discoursive steps.

In rhetorical terms, the 2013 *Framework for Cooperation* may be considered a high level statement of intent between two nationally distinct government departments. The aims are consistent with efforts to secure territorial cohesion and cooperation, central themes of contemporary EU thinking. Moreover, formalisation of the EU's territorial cohesion policy focuses on addressing territorial imbalances, promoting overall harmonious national and regional economic development, reducing existing disparities between economic geographies, and seeking to create territories without internal frontiers. This reflects the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy which seeks to transform Europe into "the most competitive area of sustainable growth in the world" (Faludi, 2005: 3). The language of the 2013 *Framework for Cooperation* reflects this thinking, asserting that: "Effective planning means creating competitive and sustainable places and bringing about better balance between meeting development needs and protecting our shared environment. Prioritisation of investment means targeting resources where they will create the greatest competitive advantage" (DRD&DEHLG, 2013: 5). The publication of the 2013 *Framework for Cooperation* may be considered part of an intellectual process of developing a shared vocabulary and understanding so as to provide a particular strategic spatial agenda for the island of Ireland as a whole.

Overcoming "back-to-back" planning and promoting cooperation and cohesion, however, are nonetheless difficult to achieve in practice. For example, Tölle (2013), in the specific context of Germany and Poland, cautions that similar institutional and organisational structures may not coincide with a similar idea of what spatial planning is about in the respective jurisdictions. He concludes that any convergence of individual planning systems - if it were to have a constructive impact on cross-border planning - needs to be based on the acceptance of joint planning standards, objectives and values. Moreover, as Allmendinger and Haughton (2010) asserted, strategic spatial planning is complex, contested and layered. Creating the

necessary intellectual and institutional conditions for cross-border and transnational cooperation is further complicated by the different scales of government and parties involved. There is an argument that collective engagement needs to be innovative with strong central-local, inter-sectoral, public-private, and cross-border coordination (de Vries and Priemus 2003). This effectively means securing practical acceptance of a joint spatial planning ethos across different interests and value sets. These perspectives not only highlight how difficult securing a shared spatial planning lexicon is in practice but hint at the complexities of their material articulation.

Conceptually, the paper draws on a body of work concerned with cross-border regionalism to trace and explain the provenance of the 2013 *Framework for Cooperation*. Based on Scott's (1999: 606) model of cognitive, discursive and material considerations in political regulation, the starting point for this discussion is that cross-border cooperation is "seen as a means of managing complex processes of economic globalisation whilst at the same time, eliminating structural and cognitive barriers to problem-solving within international border regions." In effect, cross-border regionalism may be interpreted as a potentially new form of regional governance over and above traditional and established jurisdictional arrangements. On the island of Ireland this interface involves two distinct planning systems, contextualised by a complex cultural and community history. The aim of the paper is to contribute to understandings of how different nation states negotiate transnational and cross-border spatial planning agendas. In so doing, the paper attends to what Newman (2008) identified as the formal and ordinary politics of planning and deploys theories of public diplomacy in order to explain the steps involved in issuing a joint commitment to a cooperative, non-statutory spatial planning all-island approach.

Public Diplomacy in Spatial Planning and Cross-Border Regionalism

Discussions of the contested policy environment of European spatial planning has prompted a concern with how new policy discourses are framed and implemented. Richardson and

Jensen (2000: 504), for example, differentiated between: “language, meaning and representation, material practice and power-rationality” and asserted that emergent European spatial narratives are predicated on economic growth and balanced spatial development. In creating new cross-border spatialities, then, attention must be paid to both symbolic meanings and material practices (Richardson and Jensen, 2003). Efforts to reframe spatial practice in the light of European thinking may materialise in text based form, such as the 2013 *Framework for Cooperation*, or through physical manifestations, such as shared infrastructure and other services across the island of Ireland. Different rationalities are deployed by different interests in support of different ambitions, priorities and agendas.

Academic commentaries have argued that territorial cohesion provides a relatively imprecise, abstract and normative concept in advancing European goals. Open to interpretation, territorial cohesion has been used as a linguistic and metaphorical vehicle to frame and exploit opportunities, rather than simply to address problems, in addition to encouraging opportunities and networking (Faludi, 2013). When used to legitimate a variety of policy ambitions, Evers (2012: 1) noted:

> *Among other things, territorial cohesion has been framed in terms of socioeconomic solidarity across regions in Europe, good governance, public services, unique geographical characteristics, sustainable development, economic competitiveness, rural/urban partnerships and spatial planning.*

Territorial cohesion is thus a malleable concept, able to precipitate a number of transnational arguments for cooperative behaviours.

In the specific context of cross-border regionalism, Scott (1999) identified three underpinning aspects to engendering and enacting cooperative behaviours. First, he pointed to the importance of developing regional self-awareness in relation to shared problems. In cognitive terms, he suggests, this phase relates to the social reconstruction of economic, political and cultural variables at different spatial levels and involves generating a shared understanding

and intellectual framing of the context, issues and challenges faced. Second, cross-border regionalism then requires effecting political legitimacy through an explicit articulation of a shared discourse. The 2013 *Framework for Cooperation* may then be seen as an embryonic shared "platform" for articulating what is perceived as a common agenda. Finally, Scott (1999) identified a third category which he terms, material, and which is concerned with allocating the practical resources and incentives necessary to implement cross-border cooperation.

In his discussion of strategic spatial planning, Newman (2008: 1382), however, highlighted a number of inherent difficulties in securing and sustaining collective action in practice. He pointed to a need to focus on practical questions, rather than more abstract ideals and beliefs and urged that attention be paid to the "ordinary politics of planning" and "how actors assess the challenges, opportunities and the incentives necessary for collaboration" (ibid). Specifically, Newman (2008: 1374) asserted that a core challenge was "to create the spatial imagination to get things done." This reasoning highlights the imperative of generating shared thinking, an idea which is echoed in Steele's (2011) emphasis on developing an appropriate institutional learning agenda to instigate problem re-framing and transformative change. Taken together these arguments suggest that the development of a joint statement of intent across two distinct jurisdictions, for example, is subject to reflexive learning and developing a shared vocabulary to intellectualise the rationale and communicate a common agenda.

In the context of cross-border regionalism, Scott (1999: 605) pointed to the increase in "diplomatic" activities as indicative of change in the policy-making role of the nation state. Here the ideas of public diplomacy then provide important insights into how nation states articulate shared agendas for action. Conventionally, public diplomacy has primarily been associated with foreign policy and Cold War politics. Reflecting changing political paradigms, more recently the discipline has extended to other academic and public policy areas, placing an interdisciplinary emphasis on framing of ideas, communication strategies, and symbolic

interactions between different entities (Gilboa, 2008). In practical terms, public diplomacy refers to the ways in which states understand and articulate cultures, attitudes and behaviours; build and manage external relationships; and influence opinions and actions to advance their interests (Gregory, 2008). A central concept of public diplomacy rests on what is described as the exercise of "soft power" - which is more than an art of simple persuasion - and includes an ability to entice and attract support through reputation and emulation (Nye, 2008). Soft power is held to rest on three sources: culture, political values and foreign policies. Good public diplomacy goes beyond propaganda and public relations. It involves building long-term relationships that create an enabling environment for the implementation of government policies (Nye, 2008). This helps to explain Scott's (1999) analytical framework of cognitive, discursive and material categories for understanding cross-border regionalism and its associated planning and governance and which will be used to critically examine the 2013 *Framework for Cooperation*. The next section sets the context to the emergent spatial public diplomacy on the Island of Ireland.

Cross-Border Regionalism on the Island of Ireland

The island of Ireland comprises two distinct territories and constitutional jurisdictions – the Republic of Ireland (Ireland), and Northern Ireland, one of three devolved administrations in the UK alongside Wales and Scotland. Whilst the UK and Ireland are both members of the European Union, Ireland, with a population of 4.6 million, is part of the Eurozone; Northern Ireland, with a population of 1.8 million, uses Pound Sterling. There are also different fiscal provisions prevailing between the two jurisdictions – such as the prevailing rates of corporation tax. There is an enduring, complex and contested political history and set of experiences across the island of Ireland. Irish independence in 1921 and the creation of Northern Ireland under the Government of Ireland Act 1920, and regional devolution following the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement are significant for recent discussions around maturing transnational, cross-border spatial planning thinking and practice. The

British-Irish jurisdictional division illustrates an operational reality of cross-border working in a defined island environment.

Ireland and the UK are described as being amongst the most centralised states in Europe, with correspondingly weak local government arrangements alongside centralised control (O'Dowd et al., 1995). Such a relatively *dirigiste* context has created conditions in which stakeholders have tended to attempt to by-pass established power structures in order to advance specific policy agendas. This includes making reference to European Directives to secure particular environmental agendas, for example (Bugdahn, 2005; Stokes et al., 2006). It follows that this weak local governance context must reduce the capacity of cross-border local authority cooperation, raising practical questions with respect to working relations and day-to-day planning and development activities across and between scales. It also suggests that different communities of interest, place and identity may use the European discourse in strategic ways, with the nature of European relations differentiated across the two parts of the island of Ireland. O'Dowd et al. (1995) contrasted the consistent support for European economic integration on the part of successive Irish governments, with an on-going tendency to scepticism of Europe by British governments.

The British-Irish border region has been described by O'Dowd et al. (1995: 274) as "the most violently contested border region in western Europe" -

> *A product of the balance of coercion between Britain and nationalist Ireland in 1920, the partition of Ireland installed an erratic and meandering international boundary of 450km, cross-cutting 1400 agricultural holdings and 180 roads, and bisecting villages and even some individual houses (Busteed, 1992:16). Ethno-national minorities were left stranded on either side. Over the next 50 years, this improbable boundary was to endure, and was consolidated by the second world war and the different evolution of both national states. However, the outbreak of the civil rights protests in Northern Ireland in the 1960s and the ensuing conflict made clear that longevity was not synonymous with legitimacy.*

Whilst the Irish border-region may be viewed as sharing a language and being relatively open, there are less desirable common features. Challenges include “peripherality, poor land, dependency on small farms, high levels of unemployment and out-migration and poor infrastructure”, together with “a strong sense of marginalization *vis-a vis* their respective states on both sides of the boundary” with separation of “both Protestants and Catholics from their co-religionists in the other state” at various points along the border (O’Dowd et al., 1995: 275). Making the case for integrating spatial planning thinking in the island of Ireland context thus involves complex interpretations of what is understood as joint working, sharing of services and overcoming “back to back” planning in balanced, socially just and economically productive ways, in other words, securing territorial cohesion.

Inter-governmental working between Northern Ireland and Ireland must be understood, however, as involving a range of different experiences, expectations, powers and resources. Meehan (2000: 86) noted that “the EU has made no difference to sectarian factionalism within Northern Ireland but has facilitated better working relations between the governments of Ireland and the UK, ‘pooling sovereignty’ in the EU having spilled-over’ into ‘pooling sovereignty’ over Northern Ireland.” Evidence from European Peace and INTERREG projects indicates that European funding for socio-economic and environmental cooperative efforts have led to practical benefits on the island of Ireland (Taillon *et al.*, 2011; Potter and Egerton, 2011), providing some evidence of pragmatic cooperation and increased political and policy contact at the local level. Defined policy spheres – including transport, agriculture, tourism, education, health, and the natural environment - are designated areas for potential cooperation. Effectively demonstrating the maturing public diplomacy on the island, the cross-border policing strategy, introduced in 2012, builds on established practical and strategic cooperation in the two jurisdictions. Significantly, the An Garda Síochána and the Police Service of Northern Ireland (2012) claimed that the cooperation evident in the strategy is “unprecedented in its depth and significance.” This attempt at joint working recognises that

issues such as terrorism, serious and organised and local crime do not recognise national boundaries and thus require active cooperation and joint working.

Practical sector-based attempts at cross-border collaboration have not been without their difficulties, however, and have been undermined by conflicting policy approaches, differentiated funding stream designs, variegated competencies, and divergent priorities in the respective administrations (Heenan and Birrell, 2005). The nature of the difficulties confronting cross-border working may be illustrated by a perceived absence in strategic planning thinking in cross-border tourism connections, for example. Teague and Henderson (2006: 1094) pointed to the lack of "an institutional mechanism to synchronize planning interventions on a cross-border basis" despite tourism being identified as a priority sector for cooperation. Evidence in relation to social work (Heenan and Birrell, 2005) and local community initiatives in the border area (McCall and Williamson, 2000) similarly highlighted the need to improve coordination and governance in an all-island context. These examples demonstrate a broader concern that transnational sector-based cooperative initiatives risk being undermined by a deficit in strategic planning thinking to coordinate spatial relations. It emphasises the importance of devising an appropriate spatial perspective in guiding planning and development. Such a re-framing in spatial planning terms could then transform policy and practice.

Spatial Planning on the Island of Ireland

The particular contexts in which individual planning regimes have developed on the island of Ireland are highly differentiated. Northern Ireland follows a generalised form of the UK discretionary planning system. This comprises a development plan framework, a predominantly permissive regime involving the granting of development rights in relation to specific applications, and enforcement arrangements to ensure consistent compliance with the rules. There is an important caveat. Following civil unrest in the 1960s, direct rule by the Westminster Government in 1972 resulted in centralised control and delivery of many local

government services, including statutory land use planning (Murie, 1973). The Planning (Northern Ireland) Act 2011 presages a new planning system which involves devolving powers to new local authorities in 2015 (Lloyd and Peel, 2012). Statutory land use planning and local government remain the responsibility of the Department of the Environment. What may be understood as spatial planning is the responsibility of the Department of Regional Development. This distinction means a separation of spatial and regulatory planning functions which is further accentuated by a power-sharing governmental context in Northern Ireland.

In strategic, spatial planning terms, the first Regional Development Strategy (Department for Regional Development, 2002) was devised to provide an over-arching spatial framework to inform the future geographical distribution of economic activities across Northern Ireland to 2025 (Murray and Murtagh, 2007). Its preparation, context and policy prescriptions suggested a relatively traditional form of regional planning and development for economic growth (Murray, 2009). Following a process of amendment and consultation, the revised Regional Development Strategy 2035 (Department for Regional Development, 2012) was intended to serve as a multi-sector spatial framework for Northern Ireland governance. It asserts the importance of Belfast and Derry/Londonderry as the urban drivers of regional economic growth and the role played by clusters of settlements across Northern Ireland. It promotes integrated transport and land use developments. Significantly it is a statutory document and is therefore a material consideration in land use planning decision-making. The Regional Development Strategy is not limited to land use matters, however, but seeks to present a more integrated strategic decision-making framework which reflects the inter-relationships between physical development, and economic, social and environmental matters in Northern Ireland. It recognises the uncertainties arising as a consequence of prevailing economic and financial conditions and it asserts strategic principles to consider infrastructure investment and key projects. Particular attention is paid to external and internal communications; renewable energy; waste management; and climate change projects.

In the Republic of Ireland, there are similar planning components – national spatial planning, development plans, regulation, and enforcement. The country's economic transformation in the 1960s, from a predominantly rural society to industrial growth, urbanisation and inward investment, resulted in a significant change in its ideology with planning intended "as having a major role to play in smoothing the way for the emergence of the new geographies, or spatial patterns, required by the modernisation of the Irish economy and society" (Bartley, 2007: 33). In effect, local planning was inextricably linked with land and property development – with an emphasis on the zoning functions of planning authorities. From the 1980s local land use planning in Ireland became increasingly entrepreneurial leading to urban sprawl. The local focus of planning, and its explicitly political character, created calls for consolidation, yet the principal elements and decision-making cultures endured. In the 1990s, there was a more deliberate turn to spatial planning thinking (Walsh, 2009), with an agenda of achieving a better balance of social, economic and physical development across the territory.

The National Spatial Strategy was taken forward as a counterpoint to the essentially local focus of land use planning (Bartley, 2007). Its publication in 2002 was part of the strategic economic transformation of Ireland and the Strategy was described as an early expression of European spatial planning thinking (Walsh, 2009). The document asserted a national strategy for planning and development and set out "how Ireland can be spatially structured and developed over the next twenty years in a way that is internationally competitive, socially cohesive and environmentally sustainable" (Department of Environment and Local Government, 2002: 38). The Strategy set out to realise coordinated development between various localities. In particular, it sought to achieve more balanced regional development, while still recognising the importance of Dublin as an economic centre (Meredith and van Egeraat, 2013). Regional Planning Guidelines set out strategic long term policies to provide the context to local planning arrangements. The aims of the Strategy were sustainable development throughout the country, reduced urban sprawl, enhanced public transport

networks, and a balanced relationship with the environment. It identified hub and gateway points as a focus for economic, social and residential development, asserted the need to address the western periphery, and highlighted the significance of cooperative planning at the border with Northern Ireland. Nevertheless, whilst the National Spatial Strategy provided a wider context for balanced regional development, Gkartzios and Scott (2009) argued that in rural areas decisions over housing development continued to rest on traditional land use planning metrics which tended to be non-strategic in character.

Individually, both sets of spatial planning arrangements on the island of Ireland promote sustainable development, balanced regional development, are sensitive to spatial differences, promote tiers of urban centres, gateways and hubs, and support their respective rural economies. Nevertheless, the existing spatial planning arrangements offer a number of tensions in terms of their individual legislative, constitutional and processural characteristics.

Since the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement a discourse of joint working, cooperation and integration has been evident in debates on the island, although these are highly differentiated in practice. Various interpretations of territorial planning and management are used in a range of ways by different interests informed by, *inter alia*, relations determined by geographical proximity of towns either side of the border, such as Newry and Dundalk (ICLRD, 2008); acknowledgement of scalar functional complementarities, epitomised by the eastern developmental axis of Dublin and Belfast (ICLRD, 2010); and strategic policy concerns, including waste management, energy and shared services, particularly in immediate border localities (ICLRD, 2012a). In terms of re-framing spatial planning thinking as integral to a stronger cross-border regionalism, research and advocacy have been used to sustain critical thinking around a case for a spatial planning framework for the island of Ireland. The turn to a spatial perspective in both parts of the island of Ireland – although articulated differently – has created an intellectual context for debating an all-Ireland spatial framework.

Provenance of the 2013 *Framework for Cooperation*

This section traces the steps to developing political and policy commitment to advance a spatial perspective for the island of Ireland as a whole. This operates at a number of scales. Murray (2004), for example, argued that the ESDP served to encourage a common understanding and approach to spatial planning across the island of Ireland. This complements related supranational influences. In terms of environmental governance, for example, international policy objectives set out in EU Directives cut across political territorial boundaries. This necessitates, for instance, the realisation of "joint coordinated national responses to achieve effective management of invasive, non-native species between the two jurisdictions" (Stokes et al., 2006: 2830). In parallel there have been efforts to re-imagine the broader competitive territorial space agenda envisioned by the EU.

Efforts to mobilise cooperation have reflected changing perceptions of local, regional and trans-national circumstances. Across the island of Ireland, this has included a broad constituency of communities of interest, place and identity and taken account of a range of co-influencing, socio-economic and environmental dynamics. Specific attention has been paid to advancing a deliberate cross-border spatial planning agenda, fostered by European policy, funding and research (Blair *et al*., 2007). The case for joint working, structuring of cross-border constitutional relations, and multi-sector engagement has been further substantiated with reference to the importance of retaining special landscapes and environmental habitats to support the tourism sector, for example, including those recreational fishing activities taking place in protected sites which physically span the border.

The establishment of InterTrade Ireland under the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement was designed to create a specific implementation body "to lead the development of the island economy through distinctive knowledge-based interventions which will produce significant returns in the areas of cross-border trade and business development." With a strongly economic remit, this organisation has investigated the barriers and potential for cross-border

public-private partnership mechanisms to address perceived deficits in infrastructure provision across the island, forming part of an emerging all-Ireland governance network. This body may be considered an institutional sponsor for the idea of a cross-border strategic spatial planning framework.

The approach to an all-Ireland agenda prompted consideration of the ways in which economically deterministic objectives could be realised. Three options were proposed and evaluated (InterTrade Ireland, 2006). These included the do-nothing option of resting on the separate activities of the two states; the creation of a formal all-island spatial plan with associated and cascading institutional arrangements; and a third approach predicated on (relatively more informal) *collaboration* between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The latter was the preferred option. The publication of the InterTrade Ireland (2006) report, *Spatial Strategies on the Island of Ireland. Development of a Framework for Collaborative Action***,** was followed by active advocacy – such as the arguments put forward by the International Centre for Local and Regional Development (ICLRD) (Walsh, 2013). The momentum of advocacy proved to be important. It touched on both theoretical and practical arguments for securing integrated working in planning and development across the island of Ireland and specifically its border areas.

Issued jointly by both governments, the 2011 Consultation Paper explored the case for *collaborative* working in strategic spatial planning across the island of Ireland (DRD&DEHLG, 2011). This document represented a formalised attempt to assert a strategic understanding of the intentions and inter-relations between the respective spatial planning agendas of the two jurisdictions and may be understood as advancing the cognitive prerequisites for cross-border regionalism. In launching the consultation exercise, Minister Ó Cuív stated:

> *The island of Ireland faces considerable challenges in building a sustained economic recovery in a future that will be increasingly dominated by globalisation. One of the ways the island will flourish will be through practical co-operation between north and south in meeting the planning, investment and environmental management needs of today in a way that will turn*

> *into the economic and job creation opportunities of tomorrow. I believe that the new Framework for Collaboration will deliver a real step-change in planning for this island, harnessing the complementary strengths of both rural and urban areas and delivering real mutual benefits at both a local border level and the larger island level. For example, more effective sharing of information between planning systems north and south on economic, housing, transport and environmental trends will enable a more joined-up approach to planning in border areas. Furthermore, the framework provides a mandate for practical co-operation on planning and infrastructure co-ordination within border areas and beyond* (ESPON Interstrat, 2011: 3).

Insights into perceived practical realities and the ordinary politics of operationalising collaborative planning can be gleaned from the responses to the 2011 Consultation Paper summarised for Northern Ireland (Department of Regional Development, 2011). Despite the limited number of formal consultation responses (21), the views were diverse reflecting, perhaps, a beginning of a widening of shared spatial interests for the island of Ireland. A number of perspectives are evident as different interests imagined the opportunities and constraints of establishing an all-Ireland strategic spatial planning collaborative framework in different ways. Discussion of a selection of responses offers insights into the concerns, strategic behaviours and perceived benefits for what, at that time, was cast as collaborative action.

Reflecting on what may be considered a conventional central-local governance rationality (Entwistle, 2010) an important caveat advanced by one local authority was the need to protect sub-regional and local spatial developments (Ards Council). This assertion of subsidiarity is a reminder that high level strategic planning should be sensitive to local autonomous decision-making so as to better respect the fabric of smaller places. From a local cross-border perspective, Newry and Mourne District Council highlighted that collaboration has already evolved organically through local authority clustering and “low key exchanges”. Indeed, its relationship with Dundalk Council on the opposite side of the border has been secured through a Memorandum of Understanding (McArdle, 2013) - an example

of soft contractualism (Lloyd and Peel, 2012). This particular joint local authority response highlights the existing political realities around bottom-up networks and alliance building and raises a concern that existing locally nurtured diplomatic arrangements should not be damaged by a potentially *dirigiste* policy innovation at the state – or island-wide – level.

The consultation responses indicate broad agreement that transnational collaboration was desirable – even if the precise projects and priority areas for intervention remained to be agreed. Different spatial levels were invoked as part of individual arguments. Specific responses articulated different scales of argument around particular concerns relating to transnational, national and border issues and with respect to specific localities. Scalar reference was made to local towns, regions, cross-border, all-Ireland, and transnational levels emphasising that any strategic spatial planning framework needs to address governance issues appropriately. With reference to the health and social care sector and the maritime environment, for example, attention was drawn to specific EU Directives, thereby calling on a higher authority to legitimise cross-border cooperation and environmental protection to encompass not just the land but also marine resources, a consequence of the growing interest in the maritime economy.

A market rationality (Entwistle, 2010) was articulated by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) which emphasised that implementation of transnational spatial planning perspectives should be prescriptive, prioritising development proposals as part of a spatial hierarchy that should explicitly serve to enhance a sustainable economy. The professional body argued that the strategic spatial planning framework should reflect agreed investment strategies and published government plans of action. This perspective infers that the framework approach may be understood as an expression of modernisation in seeking greater consistency and certainty for public and private decision-makers. The rationale is based on efficiency and effectiveness arguments which envisage an economic space free from political borders.

Certain service providers and environmental interests identified collaborative advantages that could potentially be gained by more extensive transnational working, including beyond the physical island of Ireland, and certainly beyond the immediate cross-border context. Similarly, RICS pointed to the need for spatial collaboration across the British Isles, and specifically with Scotland and Wales, explicitly extending transnational cooperation beyond the island's terrestrial territorial confines and into the maritime environment. Such market-oriented expectations highlight a particular agenda and accentuate the potential difficulties in giving material expression to the aspirations of the 2013 *Framework for Cooperation*.

A number of obstacles and requirements were identified by the consultee respondents. Mention was made, for example, to the differentiated financial regimes which are held to create disparity between the UK and the Republic of Ireland. In practical ways, a number of interests referred to the need for shared data sets and better evidence to facilitate cross-border and all-Ireland working. More generally, attention was drawn to the need for skills and capacity building, not only with respect to facilitating collaboration and transnational working, but also implementation of statutory land use planning reforms. No mention of cohesion – economic, social or territorial – was made in any of the responses reviewed suggesting that these concepts were not part of an established discourse.

In June 2013, the *Framework for Cooperation* was published. It involved a nuanced shift in nomenclature from collaboration to cooperation, and the launch involved officers from the two jurisdictions rather than ministers, potentially undermining the status of the document. The 2013 *Framework for Cooperation* contextualises its intellectual foundations with an explicit reference to the ESDP and the EU's Territorial Agenda which, as discussed, advocate cooperation and connectivity between regions. This reasoning was used to make the case that cooperation is important - particularly to address cross-border issues, secure policy support or fiscal resources, provide coherent infrastructure provision, ensure consistency in policy design and implementation, promote cross-boundary networking, and, conforming to supranational goals, to assist in meeting European ambitions of global

competitiveness. As such, the document provides an important internal communication mechanism and an outward-facing position statement for managing local, cross-border, trans-national, and foreign relations. From this perspective, it may be considered to represent high level public diplomacy in securing cross-border regionalism.

The 2013 *Framework for Cooperation* promotes four priority areas: (i) enhancing competitiveness; (ii) competitive places; (iii) environmental quality; and (iv) improved spatial analysis. In terms of content, this non-statutory document draws attention to common strategic development issues, opportunities and challenges in relation to spatial planning in Northern Ireland and Ireland. It advocates cooperation to foster a more beneficial approach on cross-border issues and projects and as a way to benefit from the complementarities between the separate planning approaches in the two jurisdictions. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, a dominant theme is cooperation to facilitate economic recovery through more effective planning and prioritisation of investment.

Interpretations and Theoretical Considerations for Spatial Public Diplomacy

Predicated on voluntary cooperation, spatial planning, as articulated in the European context, includes an emphasis on regional identity building and the devising of appropriate place-based policies. This specificity helps to explain why different approaches are evident. In the context of international spatial planning debates, the 2013 *Framework for Cooperation* may be seen as a particular conceptual and symbolic working through of what territorial cohesion as spatial planning means (Othengrafen and Cornett, 2013). This section critically reflects on the specific experiences of the island of Ireland.

An important European Union response to the effects of globalisation is to reduce the negative effects of its internal borders. Located against arguments for reform of European cohesion policy which call for “critical engagement by policy-makers in the field of spatial planning to ensure that cohesion policy is sufficiently reflected in implementing and monitoring national and regional spatial strategies” (Daly and González 2011: 79), part of the

appeal of the territorial cohesion concept is that divergent participants can attach their own agendas to it. Territorial cohesion as a concept is thus seen as offering a solution to a range of specific problems (Evers, 2012), such as promoting economic competitiveness (Othengrafen and Cornett, 2013). The cohesion agenda remains underscored by a set of normative ideals relating to addressing relative economic and social disparities and promoting community and environmental justice objectives within and across defined sovereign territories. Territorial cohesion remains to be interpreted, conceptualised and articulated by individual member states, however, to fit local circumstances. It follows that effective transnational and cross-border planning arrangements require practical social construction and action by different individual member states (Perkmann, 2003). Territorial cohesion may then be considered a high level bridging concept to be used by those making the case for securing spatial policy coherence. The relative absence of territorial cohesion in framing arguments for an all-island spatial strategy suggests this concept remains relatively abstract in terms of negotiating transnational spatial priorities.

In practical terms, the intellectual development of the 2013 *Framework for Cooperation* for the island of Ireland forms part of a concerted effort to promote joint working between two distinct jurisdictions. Since the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, both the UK and Ireland have sought to promote greater cohesion and connectivity across a number of practical activities, including the provision of energy infrastructure and connected transport linkages across the border (Teague and Henderson, 2006). In terms of spatial planning, specific efforts to articulate collaboration explicitly were asserted, for example, by a pan-island body, InterTrade Ireland. This advocacy contributed to a broader economic and industrial development and inward investment strategy which sought to create an island-wide network to enhance its overall economic competitiveness. From a public diplomacy perspective, an important mobilising role was devolved to a third party. Ministerial-level support was evident in the launching of the 2011 iteration of the Framework, which, tellingly, described the joint statement as "*a mandate for practical co-operation on planning and*

infrastructure co-ordination within border areas and beyond" (ESPON Interstrat, 2011: 3). Importantly, however, the anticipated infrastructure has not yet fully materialised.

In terms of high level politics (Newman, 2008), the 2011 – 2013 framework development window demonstrates an inclusive and democratic step towards two nation states articulating a non-statutory form of territorial cohesion informal protocol for the island of Ireland, legitimised, in part, through a formal consultation process. As noted above, this approach built on the asserted need for collaborative activities in defined sectors and some practical experience of cross-border working in the energy and airport sectors, and around road and rail investment. The drawing up of the joint statement thus illustrates the exercising of soft power to mobilise the idea of preparing a shared platform. Securing a relatively more explicit transnational commitment to integrating the two spatial planning strategies was then predicated on advancing the conceptual and purposive reconciliation of two sets of institutional arrangements and organisational governance across a range of planning, economic development, environmental, and infrastructure agendas. Cognitive reasoning has been used to raise awareness and to promote greater higher level coordination. In terms of operationalisation, this involved attending to the low politics (Newman, 2008) of local implementation to encourage policy-makers across public, voluntary and private sectors to buy in to the need to take a wider perspective on strategic spatial planning matters across the island of Ireland. Diplomatic efforts to shift cultures, attitudes and behaviours, influence opinions and build and manage relationships have sought to advocate collective action across the two jurisdictions as part of explicit cross-border spatial planning discourse-building strategies.

Putting the 2013 *Framework for Cooperation* into material effect is more elusive. The publication of the most recent iteration took place at a time of parallel processes of radical local government reorganisation (Brady and O'Neill, 2013), land use planning reforms, and establishing new working relationships in the immediate cross-border communities (ICLRD, 2013). The relatively extensive institutional and organisational changes in the short term

present practical challenges, such as devising the detailed requirements of cross-border collective action with respect to community planning and the provision of local services (Creamer *et al.,* 2011; Peel et al., 2012). Access to healthcare or education, for example, illustrates the practical realities and diplomatic sensitivities of delivering private and public services and infrastructure in two separate jurisdictions and emphasises the potential remit of the 2013 *Framework for Cooperation*.

Conclusions

The EU ambition to create territories without internal frontiers is an ambitious project requiring active implementation by individual member states. How this ambition is understood and put into effect is complicated by how individual member states frame and prioritise the issue, and how they deploy public diplomacy to advance jurisdictional interests. Overcoming inter-state frontier and competitive reasoning is also differentiated. Different constructions of transnational cooperation will vary according to the type of physical borders that exist or where distance from those borders creates alternative socio-economic priorities and possibilities. Social and cultural histories potentially crowd out processes of alternative spatial visions and are influenced by experiences of how previous investment decisions, for example, have impacted differentially, or how efforts to regenerate local economies have been mobilised organically and on a self-help basis. It then becomes important to understand how processes of social construction and public diplomacy can potentially reframe ways of doing things differently. This paper has used the island of Ireland as an exemplar of what a constructivist approach to cross-border regionalism may involve in practice.

As a re-framing and cognitive device concerned to influence transnational thinking and practice, the 2013 *Framework for Cooperation* proposes a set of actions for the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Irish Government in cooperating in the focus and implementation of their respective spatial strategies. Responding to a perceived deficit of what Henderson and McGloin (2004), for example, identified as the necessary activities of both top-down,

formal political institutions and bottom-up, informal societal interactions around the need to address cross-border infrastructural needs, the evolution of the 2013 *Framework for Cooperation* has been informed by formal strategies of consultation and sharing experience through more informal mechanisms. Research, advocacy, academic-practitioner conferences, training sessions, debate and consultation exercises in a range of government and non-government contexts (Walsh et al., 2011; ICLRD, 2012b; Walsh, 2013), involving active political engagement at a range of levels, and including individuals with direct experience in the island's Peace Building process, have cumulatively served to advance this agenda. Following Steele (2011), such sustained and diverse capacity building is clearly critical in securing shared understanding across political, policy and development interests generally unaccustomed to collaborative working across policy sectors. Taken together, the range of initiatives used in bringing to fruition the 2013 *Framework for Cooperation* may be highlighted as an example of the positive re-imagining of cross-border regionalism through a number of layers of spatial public diplomacy. Audience matters. Moreover, this is clearly a dynamic document which will change and evolve as part of an iterative process.

As attempts to produce a formalised framework for cooperation for spatial strategies on the island evolved, potential for co-influencing and co-producing planning thinking and practice made reference to, and revealed, different sources of evidence, authority and values. The island of Ireland storyline demonstrates how place-space relations may be spatially re-imagined and re-ordered in light of transnational institutional attempts to encourage cooperative working. Nevertheless, and depending on the planning rationality invoked, different interests variously deploy different arguments – whether these are supra-national planning influences from the EU and broader global dynamics, or subsidiarity, locality and place-based specificities. Articulating a territorial dimension in relation to European cohesion thinking and practice in the 2013 *Framework for Cooperation* potentially suggests a preparedness to cooperate in anticipation of emerging funding programmes.

Attempts to shift scalar relational thinking beyond sovereign boundaries with respect to territorial management through the 2013 *Framework for Cooperation* necessarily involved attempts to reconfigure cognitive positions and planning cultures and practices to better accommodate an extended range of influences and potential actors. Interventions to prepare a joint planning framework on the island of Ireland indicate that diplomatic efforts to fashion cooperative bilateral action are still evolving. Moreover, the European concept of territorial cohesion remains underdeveloped in the spatial discourse as presently articulated. Building transnational buy-in on how spatial and territorial cooperation can be achieved in practice involved nurturing commitment from established and new sectors and interests. Though few in number, respondents to the consultation process were, nonetheless, relatively diverse, potentially indicating a widening of interest in the potential of spatial thinking and practice.

What next? In terms of the wider European cohesion agenda, this case study suggests that the specific territorial cohesion discourse on the island of Ireland still remains at a relatively immature stage. Where the concept is used, there are different constructions being promulgated. At a more practical level, the perceived relevance of, and commitment to, a shared strategic spatial planning framework for the island as a whole varied depending on whether this is constructed in a global context, within a particular jurisdiction, in the specific circumstances of the border, or in the light of the politics of place. On the island of Ireland, it is clear that individual and shared social constructions of the "north-south" relationship are still shaped by how historical relations across the island are interpreted and function in practice. The sensitivities of this particular political context are then potentially reinforced by how the individual jurisdictions relate to each other, to Europe and internationally. State public diplomacy then impinges on patterns and practices of local diplomacy.

The case for a bilateral spatial planning approach is made in practical terms, appealing to different jurisdictional interests: "*to recognise and exploit opportunities for a wider perspective and to avoid 'back to back' planning."* (DRD&DEHLG, 2013: 5). The evidence of new voices emerging to inform the spatial planning discourse suggests that efforts at public diplomacy in

relation to strategic infrastructure and environmental protection, for example, have raised awareness of the potential of spatial planning though advancing cognitive understanding and investing in developing and sustaining a discoursive environment. In reaching this stage of thinking around aligning two separate spatial strategies, the language of the 2013 *Framework for Cooperation* has involved a subtle – if not symbolic - shift from collaboration to cooperation. The wider import of this terminological change remains to be seen. Moreover, the emphasis on retaining the integrity of two individual spatial planning arrangements still raises questions as to whether the 2013 *Framework for Cooperation* is sufficiently robust to have the transformative potential to effect material change. This formal statement is, nonetheless, an important step in creating an enabling environment for joint spatial planning.

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